

H G Wells

# The Country of the Blind

Retold by A L Stringer

**Intermediate graded reader**

Copyright © A L Stringer 2011

**English**Readers.org

## EnglishReaders.org graded readers

Reading is an essential skill for all students of English, whether they are speakers of other languages or young native speakers. Research has shown that those who read regularly can make faster progress towards mastery of the language.

Graded readers can help you:

- remember key vocabulary
- improve your understanding of grammar
- remember common phrases, expressions and idioms
- enjoy classic English stories that are too difficult to read in the original

## Intermediate graded readers

This reader is suitable for foreign learners of English at **Intermediate** levels (**CEFR B1-B2**), and for young native speakers at **US Grade 5** or equivalent.

Intermediate readers keep close to the original stories but are retold in modern English using words from the top 2000 most common words in the British National Corpus. This means you do not have to learn words that are very uncommon or old-fashioned. Other words are explained in footnotes.

## Features

- footnotes for difficult words, place names etc.
- bold text for words already explained
- full word list at the end of the book

## The Country of the Blind



In South America there is an old legend<sup>1</sup> about a lost valley high in the mountains where all the people are blind. It is said that at one time the people could see but long ago a disease came to the valley which caused them to lose their sight. This disability was passed to the next generation and their children were born blind too.

Around this time there was a terrible earthquake and the mountain roads leading to the valley were blocked by huge rocks. No one could come in or go out and the valley was cut off from the rest of the world and forgotten, except in the legend. No one now knows where the valley is.

---

<sup>1</sup> **legend** *noun, countable* old story about events a long time ago that may or may not be true

## *The Country of the Blind*



A few years ago, a mountaineer<sup>1</sup> by the name of Nunez was leading a climbing expedition<sup>2</sup> to Mount Parascotopetl<sup>3</sup>, one of the highest peaks in the Andes<sup>4</sup> mountains of South America.

One night, while they were camping high up, Nunez went out of his tent to tie a loose rope<sup>5</sup> and didn't come back. His friends called his name but there was no reply and it was too dangerous to look for him in the dark. When morning came, they saw tracks<sup>6</sup> in the snow leading straight to a steep precipice.<sup>7</sup> Cautiously<sup>8</sup> they looked over the edge and far below, in the hazy distance they could just see tiny trees rising on the floor of a narrow, closed valley. With horror<sup>9</sup> they realized he must have fallen over the mountain side. It was almost certain that he had been killed and as it would have been quite impossible to get into the valley to look for him, sadly they

---

<sup>1</sup> **mountaineer** *noun, countable* somebody who climbs high mountains for sport or as a job

<sup>2</sup> **expedition** *noun, countable* carefully planned journey made usually to a remote or dangerous place for some special purpose

<sup>3</sup> **Parascotopetl** *place name* imaginary mountain in the Andes mountains of South America

<sup>4</sup> **Andes** *place name* long mountain range running along the west of South America. The highest mountains in the world outside of Asia

<sup>5</sup> **rope** *noun, countable* very thick strong string

<sup>6</sup> **tracks** *noun, plural* marks in the ground made by the feet of animals, people or vehicles

<sup>7</sup> **precipice** *noun, countable* very steep side of a mountain

<sup>8</sup> **cautiously** *adverb* carefully

<sup>9</sup> **horror** *noun, uncountable* strong feeling of shock or fear

## *The Country of the Blind*

abandoned<sup>1</sup> the **expedition**, and even to this day no one has succeeded in climbing Mt Parascotopetl.

But Nunez was amazingly lucky and even though he'd dropped hundreds of metres, his fall was broken by soft snow and trees. Cut and bruised<sup>2</sup>, but not seriously injured, he picked himself up and looked around. He could see by the light of the moon that he was on a steep mountain slope<sup>3</sup> and that some way below him was a valley. Slowly and carefully, he began to make his way down the mountain until at last he had left the snow behind him and there was grass under his feet. Then, tired and aching from his fall, he found the shelter<sup>4</sup> of a large rock, lay down and went to sleep.

In the morning he woke to find he had almost reached the bottom of the mountain. He got up and continued walking down until he found himself looking into a beautiful valley. When he reached the valley floor he saw that it was surrounded on all sides by a low wall separating it from the forested mountain slope, and after searching for a short while, he came to door and walked through.

All around him were rich green fields fed by streams<sup>5</sup> of clear

---

<sup>1</sup> **abandon** *verb, transitive* leave a place or stop doing something permanently

<sup>2</sup> **bruised** *adjective* having bruises – dark coloured marks on the skin caused by hitting

<sup>3</sup> **slope** *noun, countable* something that is not level; higher at one end than the other end

<sup>4</sup> **shelter** *noun, uncountable* (find– take–) place protected from wind, rain etc

<sup>5</sup> **stream** *noun, countable* small river

## *The Country of the Blind*

water. Birds sang and insects buzzed<sup>1</sup> among the bright flowers that grew everywhere. In the distance, he could see a group of rather unusual looking huts.<sup>2</sup> He took a drink of water from a spring,<sup>3</sup> had a short rest and set off to investigate. As he walked, he noticed that the



streams were part of a complicated irrigation<sup>4</sup> system in which water from the mountains was collected in a long channel<sup>5</sup> that circled the valley. This was then fed into the streams that ran through the fields. A larger stream ran down the centre with a low wall alongside it at chest height.

Further evidence of human activity was provided by a network of neat<sup>6</sup> paths that ran between the fields, each one with a little raised wall at one side. Nunez thought this very curious<sup>7</sup> and could not imagine why they were built in this way.

Even stranger were the houses. For unlike the untidy mountain villages he was used to, these houses were built in long, neat rows on either side of the main street. They had no windows and the walls had been finished in all different colours and styles, none of them matching.

---

<sup>1</sup> **buzz** *verb transitive and intransitive* make a continuous low sound; make a sound like that made by large insects bzzzzzzzzzz.

<sup>2</sup> **hut** *noun, countable* small building for living in or storing things

<sup>3</sup> **spring** *noun, countable* place where water comes naturally out of the ground

<sup>4</sup> **irrigation** *noun* supply of water to land for plants etc.

<sup>5</sup> **channel** *noun, countable* narrow passage for water to flow along

<sup>6</sup> **neat** *adjective* tidy

<sup>7</sup> **curious** *adjective* (here) strange

## *The Country of the Blind*

Looking closely at one of these buildings and without really thinking about it, he said to himself, ‘Whoever painted this house must have been as blind as a bat.’<sup>1</sup> It was then that he suddenly remembered the old **legend** about the lost valley where the people were blind. And at the same time, he remembered an old saying:<sup>2</sup> ‘In the Country of the Blind, the One-Eyed Man is King.’ And as he said it, an idea came to him and he smiled to himself and repeated the words again and again, ‘In the Country of the Blind, the One-Eyed Man is King.’

Just then three men came out of a house. They walked slowly along the path following each another in single file.<sup>3</sup> They were dressed in rough woollen clothes with leather boots and belts, but they looked prosperous<sup>4</sup> enough. Nunez called and waved but instead of looking towards him, they put their heads to one side, as if they were listening for the source of the sound. ‘The fools must be blind,’ Nunez thought to himself as he made his way over to them. He was sure now that he was in the Country of the Blind that he’d heard about in the **legend**. As he approached he could see that their eyes were small and closed and they stood together, like men afraid, listening closely to his footsteps.<sup>5</sup> When he reached them, they put

---

<sup>1</sup> **blind as a bat** *simile* completely blind

<sup>2</sup> **saying** *noun, countable* popular sentence or phrase that uses an example to express an idea about life that is generally true

<sup>3</sup> **single file** *noun* moving along one behind the other

<sup>4</sup> **prosperous** *adjective* successful, so that you have enough money etc.

<sup>5</sup> **footstep** *noun, countable* the sound somebody’s feet make when they are walking

## *The Country of the Blind*

their hands out to touch him.

‘Who are you and where have you come from?’ they asked in a strange, old-fashioned Spanish that Nunez could just about understand. He told them he’d come over the mountains from the city of Bogota,<sup>1</sup> and when they showed no sign of understanding, he explained that it was a large, modern city. ‘Everyone there can see,’ he added. He expected they would be impressed,<sup>2</sup> or at least excited to meet a stranger from the world outside, but instead, the blind men shook their heads. ‘Nonsense,’ they muttered.<sup>3</sup> ‘What is he talking about, ‘city’, ‘mountains’ and ‘see’? What kind of crazy talk is this? There are no such things.’ ‘He came out of the rocks,’ said another.

Then they ran their hands over him, touching and feeling every inch of his body. ‘His skin is rough,’<sup>4</sup> said one of them. ‘He’s a wild man.’

‘Be careful, of my eyes,’ said Nunez, when their fingers reached his face.

‘There’s something wrong with him,’ said another. Nunez’s large moving eyes were something entirely new to them.

‘You don’t understand,’ protested<sup>5</sup> Nunez, turning round to face the one who had spoken, ‘I can see.’ And as he turned he stumbled<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> **Bogota** *place name* capital city of Colombia

<sup>2</sup> **impressed** *adjective* respecting or admiring somebody or something

<sup>3</sup> **mutter** *verb, transitive* say something quietly

<sup>4</sup> **rough** *adjective* not smooth

<sup>5</sup> **protest** *verb, intransitive* strongly disagree or complain

<sup>6</sup> **stumble** *verb, intransitive* begin to fall because your feet hit something



## *The Country of the Blind*

against a bucket<sup>1</sup> that the man had put down so that it fell over.

‘Poor stupid fellow, he can’t even move without knocking things over,’ said the first blind man. ‘Take him to the elders.’<sup>2</sup>

Nunez followed them into one of the windowless<sup>3</sup> houses. It was so dark inside that he could hardly see where he was going. ‘We have found this strange wild man who has come from the rocks,’ they said.

‘I’m from the city of **Bogota**,’ protested Nunez. ‘The big city over the mountains.’

‘Bogota?’ they repeated. ‘What on earth is ‘Bogota’? Silly fellow, he doesn’t even use proper words.’ A little boy who was watching pinched<sup>4</sup> his hand. ‘Bogota! Bogota!’ he mocked.<sup>5</sup>

‘Yes, Bogota,’ Nunez replied angrily. ‘A real city, not a village like this!’

‘His name’s Bogota,’ they said. ‘Sit down, Bogota.’

‘Surely you can understand,’ he said, ‘I have sight!’

‘He’s mad,’ they said to each other. ‘What is he talking about? What does he mean by ‘sight’?’ They crowded around him and as it was pitch black<sup>6</sup> and he could see nothing, he tripped<sup>7</sup> over

---

<sup>1</sup> **bucket** *noun, countable* round, open container for liquids etc. with a handle

<sup>2</sup> **elder** *noun, countable* old and wise people in a traditional community who act as local rulers or give advice to the people

<sup>3</sup> **windowless** *adjective* without windows

<sup>4</sup> **pinch** *verb, transitive* squeeze somebody’s skin between your finger and thumb

<sup>5</sup> **mock** *verb, transitive* laugh at someone because you don’t respect them

<sup>6</sup> **pitch black** *adjective* completely dark

<sup>7</sup> **trip** *verb, intransitive* catch your foot on something so you begin to fall

## *The Country of the Blind*

somebody and fell down.’

‘He is newly formed,’ someone said. ‘He talks nonsense and he falls over.’

Nunez lay helplessly on the floor of the hut while the elders of the village began to question him. But they could understand little of his replies, and as they spoke, Nunez slowly began to realize what had happened to these people over the fourteen generations that they had been cut off<sup>1</sup> from the outside world.

Following the earthquake and their accidental isolation,<sup>2</sup> all knowledge of the world beyond the valley had gradually faded<sup>3</sup> and as no one could see, the very idea of sight had been lost. Even the words relating to sight and seeing had, over time, disappeared from their language. Meanwhile, they had found their own ways to survive, and had developed their own ideas.

Their bodies had gradually adapted<sup>4</sup> to their blindness and their other senses had developed to an extraordinary<sup>1</sup> degree: their senses of hearing and smell were extremely powerful. They had also, with considerably cleverness, constructed a world around them that worked perfectly for people who couldn’t see. The paths with the low walls running alongside, for example, had been specially built so they couldn’t get lost. They had also **adapted** their sleeping habits to

---

<sup>1</sup> **cut off** *verb, transitive* not connected to other places

<sup>2</sup> **isolation** *noun* alone, not connected to other places or people

<sup>3</sup> **fade** *verb, intransitive* (usually of light or a colour) to become less and less strong

<sup>4</sup> **adapt** *verb, intransitive* change in order to fit a new situation

## *The Country of the Blind*

suit their needs. Having no sense of light, they slept during the hot daylight hours and worked during the night when it was cooler.

They lived the simple, dull<sup>2</sup> lives of small farmers, ignorant<sup>3</sup> but content in a world that suited their needs. Their ideas seemed strange and limited but were understandable in the circumstances. Unable to see and having neither the need nor ability to travel, they had come to believe that the valley in which they lived made up the entire universe.<sup>4</sup> They had no idea of the mountains that towered<sup>5</sup> above, and told Nunez he was foolish for believing such things existed. They only knew that the sides of the valley at their level were made of hard rock, which they could feel, and from this firm knowledge they had come to the conclusion<sup>6</sup> that the sky must also be made of rock. They believed that a rocky ceiling, very smooth, extended above them at a height of around ten men, and when Nunez tried to explain otherwise, they became very upset. ‘These are evil<sup>7</sup> thoughts,’ they told Nunez. ‘You must not say things like this. There is much that you must learn. We will teach you.’

Nunez listened for a while but soon he began to grow impatient. ‘Remember,’ he said to himself, ‘In the Country of the Blind, the One-Eyed Man is King.’ He decided to prove to them that he had the

---

<sup>1</sup> **extraordinary** *adjective* very unusual

<sup>2</sup> **dull** *adjective* not interesting

<sup>3</sup> **ignorant** *adjective* having little or no knowledge

<sup>4</sup> **universe** *noun* everything that exists – the Earth, sun, stars, planets etc.

<sup>5</sup> **tower** *verb, intransitive* rise to a great height

<sup>6</sup> **conclusion** *noun, countable* a final idea

<sup>7</sup> **evil** *adjective* very bad

## *The Country of the Blind*

power of sight and therefore, he was superior.<sup>1</sup> But this was more difficult than he had imagined.

He found that his sight was often no help at all. For a start, they were awake only during the hours of darkness and as there were no lights beyond the moon and the stars, he had to learn to do things their way or risk falling over. Their senses were so acute<sup>2</sup> and their world so perfectly **adapted** to their needs, that they always had the advantage.

After his long interview with the **elders**, he came out of the house and one of the blind men called him. ‘Come here **Bogota**.’ Nunez decided to play a little game and didn’t move. ‘Why don’t you come,’ called the man walking towards him. Nunez stepped off the path and onto the grass but the blind man’s sharp ears immediately picked up the sound although Nunez had hardly heard it himself.

‘Don’t walk on the grass, it’s now allowed’ said the man. Nunez stepped back onto the path.

‘Why didn’t you come when I called?’ scolded<sup>3</sup> the blind man. ‘Can’t you hear the path?’

‘I can see it’, replied Nunez.

‘Stop this nonsense. Now follow the sound of my feet.’ Nunez followed, feeling a little annoyed.

---

<sup>1</sup> **superior** *adjective* better than

<sup>2</sup> **acute (sense)** *adjective* very sensitive, well-developed

<sup>3</sup> **scold** *verb, transitive* tell someone (usually a child) that they have done

## *The Country of the Blind*

‘My time will come,’<sup>1</sup> he said.

‘You’ll learn,’ the blind man answered. ‘There’s much to learn in the world.’

‘Has no one ever told you, ‘In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King’?’

‘Oh really?’ said the man, wearily,<sup>2</sup> ‘And what is blind?’

The next day he was standing in the village with a group of the **elders** when he saw a man who he knew was called Pedro, walking towards the village on path number Seventeen – all of the paths were carefully numbered. Pedro was still too far away for the elders to hear or smell him coming and Nunez decided to prove to them that he could see.

‘In a little while Pedro will be here,’ he said triumphantly.<sup>3</sup> ‘He’s coming along path Seventeen now.’

‘Pedro shouldn’t be on path Seventeen,’ said an old man. And as Nunez watched him, Pedro suddenly turned off and went onto path Ten which took him in a different direction, away from the village. When Pedro didn’t arrive, they **mocked** Nunez and afterwards, when he asked Pedro which path he’d been on, Pedro was angry and denied<sup>4</sup> he’d even been on path Seventeen.

---

something wrong in an angry way

<sup>1</sup> **my time will come** *phrase* means ‘I will win / be successful eventually’

<sup>2</sup> **wearily** *adverb* from *adjective* **weary** - tired

<sup>3</sup> **triumphantly** *adverb* from **triumphant** *adjective* pleased with yourself because you have been successful or won something

<sup>4</sup> **deny** *verb, transitive* say you did not do something wrong when someone says that you did (accuses you)

## *The Country of the Blind*

Four days passed and on the fifth day the uncrowned<sup>1</sup> King of the Blind was still a clumsy<sup>2</sup> useless stranger in his kingdom.<sup>3</sup> Then he had another idea. He arranged for one of the villagers to follow him a little way up the mountain **slope** to a spot from where there was a good view of the village. From there he promised to describe everything that happened while he was away. When they returned, he told them what he had seen, but they were disappointed.<sup>4</sup> To test his power of sight they asked him about what had happened inside the houses, as this is what really interested them. Of course, he was quite unable to answer and his demonstration<sup>5</sup> was a complete failure. They were now surer than ever that he was a fool.

It was at this point that he decided he would have to use force, so he picked up a spade<sup>6</sup> with the idea of knocking one of them down. That would show them the advantage of eyes. He stood with the tool in his hands, but then he hesitated.<sup>7</sup> They stood around him in a circle, their heads on one side, their ears bent towards him listening for what he would do next and at that moment he realized that he

---

<sup>1</sup> **uncrowned** *adjective* describes a king or queen who has not been officially accepted as king or queen

<sup>2</sup> **clumsy** *adjective* describes someone who often has accidents, drops things etc. because his/her movements are not careful

<sup>3</sup> **kingdom** *noun, countable* country ruled by a king or queen

<sup>4</sup> **disappointed** *adjective* feeling of unhappiness when something is not as good as you expected

<sup>5</sup> **demonstration** *noun, countable* event that is organized to show people something or prove something to them

<sup>6</sup> **spade** *noun, countable* tool used in the garden or farm for digging holes

<sup>7</sup> **hesitate** *verb, intransitive* stop doing something for a moment; pause

## *The Country of the Blind*

couldn't hit a blind man in cold blood.<sup>1</sup>

‘Put that spade down, Bogota.’

He pushed the nearest man back against a house wall, and ran past him and out of the village across one of the fields, leaving a track of trodden<sup>2</sup> grass behind him. After a while, he sat down by the side of one of the paths. He felt good for his act of resistance<sup>3</sup> but also confused. He began to realize that you cannot even fight happily with people who have a completely different mental<sup>4</sup> outlook to yourself.

Far away he saw a number of men carrying **spades** and sticks come out of the houses and start walking towards him along the paths from the village. They moved slowly, speaking frequently to one another, and from time to time the whole line would stop, sniff<sup>5</sup> the air and listen. The first time they did this Nunez laughed. But afterwards he did not laugh. One of them found his tracks in the grass and came stooping<sup>6</sup> and feeling his way along it.

For five minutes he watched them slowly move towards him with

---

<sup>1</sup> **in cold blood** *phrase* hurt or kill someone on purpose without showing emotion

<sup>2</sup> **trodden** *past participle of tread* (here) means flat because it was trodden on

<sup>3</sup> **resistance** *noun, uncountable* (here) action that you take against authority, a government etc.

<sup>4</sup> **mental** *adjective* relating to the mind

<sup>5</sup> **sniff** *verb transitive and intransitive* take in air through your nose in order to smell

<sup>6</sup> **stoop** *verb, intransitive* bend your body down (to pick something up, for example)

## *The Country of the Blind*

a growing sense of panic.<sup>1</sup> Then he stood up, and took a step back. They all stood in a semi-circle, still and listening. He also stood still, holding his spade very tightly in both hands. Should he charge<sup>2</sup> them? In his ears he could hear the saying, 'In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King.' Some way behind him was the wall that ran around the valley but it was impossible to climb because its sides were smooth.<sup>3</sup>

Should he charge them?

'Bogota!' called one. 'Bogota! Where are you?'

He held his **spade** tighter and walked to his left through the fields. As soon as he moved they started to come towards him. 'I'll hit them if they touch me,' he said to himself. 'By God, I will. I'll hit them!' He called aloud, 'Look here, I'm going to do what I like in this valley! Do you hear? I'm going to do what I like and go where I like.'

They were closing in upon him quickly, feeling their way forward, yet moving rapidly.<sup>4</sup> 'Get hold of him!' cried one. They were getting close now. He had to do something.

'You don't understand,' he shouted in a voice that was meant to sound strong, but which cracked<sup>5</sup> with emotion.<sup>6</sup> 'You are blind and I

---

<sup>1</sup> **panic** *noun* feeling of fear that makes you unable to think clearly

<sup>2</sup> **charge** *verb transitive and intransitive* run towards someone in a violent way to attack them

<sup>3</sup> **smooth** *adjective* not rough

<sup>4</sup> **rapidly** *adverb* quickly

<sup>5</sup> **cracked** *adjective* (here) sounding strange and not strong

<sup>6</sup> **emotion** *noun, countable* feeling



## *The Country of the Blind*

can see. Leave me alone!’

‘Bogota! Put down that **spade** and don’t walk on the grass!’

There was something about the stupid order that made Nunez feel a kind of helpless **horror** and a sudden rush of anger. ‘I’ll hit you,’ he said, crying with emotion. ‘By God, I’ll hit you! Leave me alone!’

He began to run, not knowing clearly where he was going. He made a dash<sup>1</sup> for a gap<sup>2</sup> in the line of advancing men, but they immediately heard him and moved close together so he couldn’t pass. He jumped forward, and brought the spade down hard. He felt it hit somebody and a man fell down with a cry of pain, but Nunez had escaped and found himself running towards the village. Blind men, waving spades and sticks, were running everywhere. He heard **footsteps** behind him just in time and found a tall man rushing forward trying to hit him with a piece of wood. He **panicked**, threw his spade on to the ground and ran away as fast as he could, screaming<sup>3</sup> and shouting.

He couldn’t think clearly and ran madly from side to side, jumping to avoid the blind men who seemed to be on all sides of him. He slipped<sup>4</sup> and fell for a moment and they heard his fall, but he managed to get back on his feet. Far away, in the wall that ran

---

<sup>1</sup> **dash** *noun* sudden fast run

<sup>2</sup> **gap** *noun, countable* space between two things

<sup>3</sup> **scream** *verb, transitive and intransitive* make a loud cry when you are afraid or hurt

<sup>4</sup> **slip** *verb, intransitive* slide and fall over on a smooth or wet surface

## *The Country of the Blind*

around the valley, he could see a little doorway and he set off in a wild rush for it. He did not even look round until he'd reached it. Then he **stumbled** across the bridge, climbed a little way up onto the rocks and lay down gasping<sup>1</sup> for breath.

His rebellion<sup>2</sup> was at an end.

He stayed outside the wall of the valley for two days and two nights without food or a comfortable bed and thought what to do next. While he was thinking, he repeated very frequently and with increasingly bitter<sup>3</sup> disbelief,<sup>4</sup> 'In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King.' At first he thought mainly about ways of fighting and conquering<sup>5</sup> these people, but it soon became clear that for him this was not going to be possible. He had no weapons,<sup>6</sup> and how could he get any when he was so far from civilization?<sup>7</sup>

He thought hard, but he knew he could not go down and murder<sup>8</sup> a blind man to show his strength. Of course, if he did that, he might then take control of the village by threatening<sup>9</sup> to murder all of them. But sooner or later he would have to sleep!

---

<sup>1</sup> **gasp** *verb, intransitive and transitive* breathe with short sharp breaths because you are out of breath or very shocked

<sup>2</sup> **rebellion** *noun, countable* action against rules or authority

<sup>3</sup> **bitter** *adjective* disappointed and angry

<sup>4</sup> **disbelief** *noun, uncountable* not believing something

<sup>5</sup> **conquer** *verb, transitive* take control of a country of people by winning a battle or war against them

<sup>6</sup> **weapon** *noun, countable* any object that is used in a fight - knife, stick, gun etc.

<sup>7</sup> **civilization** *noun, uncountable* organized and well-developed society

<sup>8</sup> **murder** *verb, transitive* kill somebody intentionally

<sup>9</sup> **threaten** *verb, transitive* say that you will do something bad to someone or

## *The Country of the Blind*



He tried to find food among the pine<sup>1</sup> trees and make himself comfortable under their branches<sup>2</sup> when the frost<sup>3</sup> came at night. He also tried to catch a wild mountain goat<sup>4</sup> and kill it - perhaps by hitting it on the head with a stone - so he could eat some of it. But the mountain goats were too quick and nervous<sup>5</sup> and kept well away from him. On the second day he was cold and hungry and began to feel afraid. Finally he crawled<sup>6</sup> down to the wall of the Country of the Blind to negotiate.<sup>7</sup> He shouted until two blind men came out to the gate and talked to him.

‘I was crazy,’ he said. ‘But I was foolish’.

They said that was better. He told them he was wiser<sup>8</sup> now, and very sorry for all the bad things he had done. Then he started to cry for he was very weak and ill now, and they began to speak to him more kindly. They asked him if he still thought he could see.

‘No,’ he said. ‘That was nonsense. The word means nothing -

---

behave in a way that shows this

<sup>1</sup> **pine** *noun, countable* kind of tree with long, thin leaves

<sup>2</sup> **branch** *noun, countable* part of a tree that grows out from the main trunk

<sup>3</sup> **frost** *noun, countable* weather condition when the temperature falls below zero and water on the ground turns to ice

<sup>4</sup> **goat** *noun, countable* animal with horns, part of the sheep family, kept for its milk

<sup>5</sup> **nervous** *adjective* afraid

<sup>6</sup> **crawl** *verb, intransitive* move along on your hands and knees

<sup>7</sup> **negotiate** *verb, transitive and intransitive* discuss something with the aim of reaching an agreement

<sup>8</sup> **wise** *adjective* having the ability to make good decisions based on

## *The Country of the Blind*

less than nothing!’

They asked him what was overhead.

‘About ten times ten the height of a man there is a roof of rock, very, very smooth...’ He started crying again. ‘Before you ask me any more, please give me food or I’ll die!’

He expected terrible punishments, but the blind people were capable of toleration.<sup>1</sup> They saw his **rebellion** as just one more example of his general stupidity and inferiority,<sup>2</sup> and after they had beaten him, they let him stay in the village and gave him the simplest and heaviest work. Meanwhile, Nunez, realizing he had no choice, did what he was told.

He was ill for some days after that and they nursed<sup>3</sup> him kindly. But they insisted<sup>4</sup> that he lay in the dark, which made him very unhappy. Then the blind philosophers<sup>5</sup> came and talked to him about the wicked<sup>6</sup> ideas in his mind, and **scolded** him so long for his doubts<sup>7</sup> about the roof of rock that covered their valley that he almost began to believe it was true.

When he’d recovered he was sent to work as a servant for a man called Yacob. Over the weeks and months that followed, slowly he

---

understanding and experience of life

<sup>1</sup> **toleration** *noun, uncountable* ability to accept people and things that are different to yourself

<sup>2</sup> **inferiority** *noun, uncountable* less good than something

<sup>3</sup> **nurse** *verb, transitive* look after someone who is sick

<sup>4</sup> **insist** *verb, intransitive* say something very firmly

<sup>5</sup> **philosopher** *noun, countable* someone who studies the meaning of life

<sup>6</sup> **wicked** *adjective* very, very bad; evil; deliberately bad

<sup>7</sup> **doubt** *verb, transitive* not believe something

## *The Country of the Blind*

settled down<sup>1</sup> and got to know the people of the village; and as time went by, the world beyond the mountains became more and more remote<sup>2</sup> and unreal.

Yacob had a daughter called Medina-sarote and Nunez thought that she was beautiful. Even though she was blind, her eyes didn't seem to be quite as closed and shrunken<sup>3</sup> as those of the others. This was something that made her unattractive to the young men of the valley, and consequently, she had no boyfriend. Nunez began to talk to her and found that she was friendly and seemed to like him. Every time he saw her, he spoke to her and soon they were having long chats and walks together. At first he didn't talk about his eyes but as they grew closer, he eventually told her that he could see. To his joy, she listened. Of all the people in the valley, Medina-sarote was the only one who would listen to him. She thought his stories about sight were beautiful.

Yacob, however, was not happy about their friendship. Although he had come to like Nunez, he didn't see a man who talked nonsense and worked as a servant as a suitable partner for his daughter. On the other hand, he was very fond of<sup>4</sup> Medina-sarote and it was clear that she was in love with Nunez. He didn't want to make her unhappy so he went to the village **elders** to ask for their advice. After a while

---

<sup>1</sup> **settle down** *phrasal verb* make a permanent home in a place

<sup>2</sup> **remote** *adjective* far from other towns or cities

<sup>3</sup> **shrunken** *adjective* smaller than normal

<sup>4</sup> **fond** *adjective* liking somebody or something very much

### *The Country of the Blind*

they came up with a solution.<sup>1</sup> The problem with Nunez, they said, was his strange moving eyes. This was what made him different and what seemed to be the cause of all his crazy talk and unhappiness. They called Nunez to the house of the village elders.

‘You wish to marry Medina-sarote,’ they said.

‘I do,’ said Nunez.

‘Then you’ll have to agree to one condition, and we’ll allow the marriage to go ahead.’

‘What’s that?’ asked Nunez.

‘It’s very simple,’ they said. ‘It’s these ‘eyes’ that make you behave like a crazy person. If you want to be one of us, you’ll have to agree to have them removed. We’ll do an operation<sup>2</sup> to remove your eyes, and then you’ll be a happy, normal person like the rest of us.’ Nunez didn’t know what to say or what to do, but they were impatient, and he loved Medina-sarote so much that at last, after much agonizing, he agreed to have his eyes removed the following week.

On the evening before he was due to have the operation, he went to see Medina-sarote. They went for a walk and he looked at the setting sun and said, ‘Tomorrow I shall see no more.’

‘I know, my dear’ she said. ‘But don’t worry, they won’t hurt you.’ He held her in his arms and kissed her and then she turned and

---

<sup>1</sup> **solution** *noun, countable* answer to a problem

<sup>2</sup> **operation** *noun, countable* action performed by doctor to remove or repair part of the body

## *The Country of the Blind*

went home to bed. As she went, he looked after her and, full of pity, whispered,<sup>1</sup> ‘Goodbye.’

Then he turned and began to walk. He walked straight out of the village towards the mountains, and when he reached the first hills he began to climb, straight up towards the last light of the sun. It was difficult and he cut his arms and legs on the sharp rocks as he pulled himself further away from the valley.

When the sun finally set he was no longer climbing, but he was far and high. His clothes were torn,<sup>2</sup> his arms and legs were blood-stained<sup>3</sup> and he was **bruised** in many places, but he lay quietly and there was a smile on his face.

From where he rested the valley seemed to be in a deep, dark hole nearly a mile below. Already it was dim<sup>4</sup> with haze<sup>5</sup> and deep, mysterious<sup>6</sup> shadows, blue turning to purple, and purple to darkness. Around him the mountain peaks were shining<sup>7</sup> in the fiery<sup>8</sup> glow<sup>9</sup> of the setting sun and overhead stretched the infinite<sup>10</sup> vastness<sup>11</sup> of the

---

<sup>1</sup> **whisper** *verb, transitive and intransitive* speak very quietly

<sup>2</sup> **torn** *past participle of tear verb, intransitive* pull paper, fabric etc. so that it breaks into pieces; remove a piece of paper from a book etc. by pulling it out

<sup>3</sup> **blood-stained** *adjectives* having marks made by blood

<sup>4</sup> **dim** *adjective* of light – not bright

<sup>5</sup> **haze** *noun, countable and uncountable* when the air is not clear due to distance, pollution etc.

<sup>6</sup> **mysterious** *adjective* strange, unknown

<sup>7</sup> **shine** *verb, intransitive* produce light

<sup>8</sup> **fiery** *adjective* containing or looking like fire

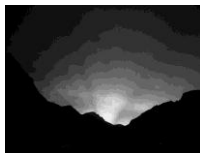
<sup>9</sup> **glow** *verb, transitive and intransitive* to produce light

<sup>10</sup> **infinite** *adjective* without end or limit

<sup>11</sup> **vastness** *noun* from **vast** *adjective* enormous, extremely big

### *The Country of the Blind*

sky. But he paid no attention as he lay, still and smiling, as if he were happy merely to have escaped from the Valley of the Blind, in which he had wanted to be King. Finally night came and still he lay there under the cold, clear stars.



ooo0ooo

*We hope you have enjoyed this simplified reading text and that you will want to read more. To see a complete list of our stories, visit [www.englishreaders.org](http://www.englishreaders.org)*



## *The Country of the Blind*

### **Word List**

**abandon** *verb, transitive* leave a place or stop doing something permanently  
**acute** (sense) *adjective* very sensitive, well-developed  
**adapt** *verb, intransitive* change in order to fit a new situation  
**Andes** *place name* long mountain range running along the west of South America. The highest mountains in the world outside of Asia  
**bitter** *adjective* disappointed and angry  
**blind as a bat** *simile* completely blind – from the popular but untrue **belief** that bats are blind  
**blood-stained** *adjective* having marks made by blood  
**Bogota** *place name* capital city of Colombia  
**branch** *noun, countable* part of a tree that grows out from the main trunk  
**bruised** *adjective* having bruises – dark coloured marks on the skin caused by hitting  
**bucket** *noun, countable* round, open container for liquids etc. with a handle  
**buzz** *verb transitive* and *intransitive* make a continuous low sound; make sound like that made by large insects bzzzzzzzzz.  
**cautiously** *adverb* carefully  
**channel** *noun, countable* narrow passage for water to flow along  
**charge** *verb transitive* and *intransitive* run towards someone in a violent way to attack them  
**civilization** *noun, uncountable* organized and well-developed society  
**clumsy** *adjective* describes someone who often has accidents, drops things etc. because his/her movements are not careful  
**conclusion** *noun, countable* a final idea  
**conquer** *verb, transitive* take control of a country of people by winning a battle or war against them  
**cracked** *adjective* (here) sounding strange and not strong  
**crawl** *verb, intransitive* move along on your hands and knees  
**curious** *adjective* (here) strange  
**cut off** *verb, transitive* not connected to  
**dash** *noun* a sudden fast run  
**demonstration** *noun, countable* event that is organized to show people something or prove something to them  
**deny** *verb, transitive* say you did not do something wrong when someone says that you did (accuses you)  
**dim** *adjective* of light – not bright  
**disappointed** *adjective* feeling of unhappiness when something is not as good as you expected  
**disbelief** *noun, uncountable* not believing something  
**doubt** *verb, transitive* not believe something  
**dull** *adjective* not interesting

## *The Country of the Blind*

**elder** *noun, countable* old and wise people in a traditional community who act as local rulers or give advice to the people  
**emotion** *noun, countable* feeling  
**evil** *adjective* very bad  
**expedition** *noun, countable* carefully planned journey made usually to a remote or dangerous place for some special purpose  
**extraordinary** *adjective* very unusual  
**fade** *verb, intransitive* (usually of light or a colour) to become less and less strong  
**fiery** *adjective* containing or looking like fire  
**fond** *adjective* liking somebody or something  
**footstep** *noun, countable* the sound somebody's feet make when they are walking  
**frost** *noun, countable* weather condition when the temperature falls below zero and water on the ground turns to ice  
**gap** *noun, countable* a space between two things  
**gasp** *verb, intransitive and transitive* breathe with short sharp breaths because you are out of breath or very shocked  
**glow** *verb, transitive and intransitive* to produce light  
**goat** *noun, countable* animal with horns, part of the sheep family, kept for its milk  
**haze** *noun, countable and uncountable* when the air is not clear due to distance, pollution etc.  
**hesitate** *verb, intransitive* stop doing something for a moment; pause  
**horror** *noun, uncountable* strong feeling of shock or fear  
**hut** *noun, countable* small building for living in or storing things  
**ignorant** *adjective* having little or no knowledge  
**impressed** *adjective* respecting or admiring somebody or something  
**in cold blood** *phrase* hurt or kill someone on purpose without showing emotion  
**inferiority** *noun, uncountable* less good than something  
**infinite** *adjective* without end or limit  
**insist** *verb, intransitive* say something very firmly  
**irrigation** *noun* system supply of water to land for plants etc.  
**isolation** *noun, uncountable* alone, not connected to other places or people  
**kingdom** *noun, countable* country ruled by a king or queen  
**legend** *noun, countable* old story about events a long time ago that may or may not be true  
**mental** *adjective* relating to the mind  
**mock** *verb, transitive* laugh at someone because you don't respect them  
**mountaineer** *noun, countable* somebody who climbs high mountains for sport or as a job  
**murder** *verb, transitive* kill somebody intentionally  
**mutter** *verb, transitive* say something quietly  
**my time will come** *phrase* means 'I will win / be successful eventually'

## *The Country of the Blind*

**mysterious** *adjective* strange, unknown

**neat** *adjective* tidy

**negotiate** *verb, transitive* and intransitive discuss something with the aim of reaching an agreement

**nervous** *adjective* afraid

**nurse** *verb, transitive* look after someone who is sick

**operation** *noun, countable* action performed by doctor to remove or repair part of the body

**panic** *noun* feeling of fear that makes you unable to think clearly

**Parascotopetl** *place name* imaginary mountain in the Andes mountains of South America

**philosopher** *noun, countable* someone who studies the meaning of life

**pinch** *verb, transitive* squeeze somebody's skin between your finger and thumb

**pine** *noun, countable* kind of tree with long, thin leaves

**pitch black** *adjective* completely dark

**precipice** *noun, countable* very steep side of a mountain

**prosperous** *adjective* successful so that you have enough money etc.

**protest** *verb, intransitive* strongly disagree or complain

**rapidly** *adverb* quickly

**rebellion** *noun, countable* action against rules or authority

**remote** *adjective* far from other towns or cities

**resistance** *noun, uncountable* (here) action that you take against authority, a government etc.

**rope** *noun, countable* very thick strong string

**rough** *adjective* not smooth

**saying** *noun, countable* popular sentence or phrase that uses an example to express an idea about life that is generally true

**scold** *verb, transitive* tell someone (usually a child) that they have done something wrong in an angry way

**scream** *verb, transitive* and intransitive make a loud cry when you are afraid or hurt

**settle down** *phrasal verb* make a permanent home in a place

**shelter** *noun, uncountable* find~ take~ place protected from wind, rain etc.

**shine** *verb, intransitive* produce light

**shrunk** *adjective* smaller than normal

**single file** *noun* moving along one behind the other

**slip** *verb, intransitive* slide and fall over on a smooth or wet surface

**slope** *noun, countable* land that is not level; higher at one end than the other end

**smooth** *adjective* not rough

**sniff** *verb transitive* and intransitive take in air through your nose in order to smell

**solution** *noun, countable* answer to a problem

**spade** *noun, countable* tool used in the garden or farm for digging holes

## *The Country of the Blind*

**spring** *noun, countable* place where water comes naturally out of the ground

**stoop** *verb, intransitive* bend your body down (to pick something up, for example)

**stream** *noun, countable* small river

**stumble** *verb, intransitive* begin to fall because your feet hit something

**superior** *adjective* better than

**threaten** *verb, transitive* say that you will do something bad to someone or behave in a way that shows this

**toleration** *noun, uncountable* ability to accept people and things that are different to yourself

**torn** *past participle* of **tear** *verb, intransitive* pull paper, fabric etc. so that it breaks into pieces; remove a piece of paper from a book etc. by pulling it out

**tower** *verb, intransitive* rise to a great height

**tracks** *noun, plural* marks in the ground made by the feet of animals, people or vehicles

**trip** *verb, intransitive* catch your foot on something so you begin to fall

**triumphantly** *adverb* from **triumphant** *adjective* pleased with yourself because you have been successful

**trodden** *past participle* of **tread** (here) means flat because it was trodden on

**uncrowned** *adjective* describes a king or queen who has not been officially accepted as king or queen

**universe** *noun* everything that exists – the Earth, sun, stars, planets etc.

**vastness** *noun* from **vast** *adjective* enormous, extremely big

**weapon** *noun, countable* any object that is used in a fight - knife, stick, gun etc.

**wearily** *adverb* from *adjective* **weary** - tired

**whisper** *verb, transitive and intransitive* speak very quietly

**wicked** *adjective* very, very bad; evil; deliberately bad

**windowless** *adjective* without windows

**wise** *adjective* having the ability to make good decisions based on understanding and experience of life